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THE SOURCES OF EARLY HEBREW HISTORY

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The international series of lesson selections for 1907 is chosen from the first nine books of the Old Testament, taken in order. Practically speaking, they are taken from the historical portions of these books. No portion of the Old Testament offers problems more serious or more instructive than these—problems whose solution determines many other important queries. There are many who fear that the facing of these difficulties will involve a lowering of their confidence in the Bible as transmitting divine truth to mankind. But the number is steadily growing less of those who refuse to give candid consideration to valid arguments which may throw light upon these gravely important questions. The great majority of the biblical students of today are diligent seekers after truth and eager users of established facts. It is to such that this article appeals. It will be intentionally untechnical. It is not in any sense an argument for the independent scholar, nor even for the average student of Old Testament literature. For such the *Beginnings of Hebrew History*, which makes the first volume of Professor Kent's notable series, "The Students' Old Testament," or the *Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, by Driver, will amply suffice. They give in complete detail the arguments for the conclusions which will in this article be merely stated.

The nine Old Testament books in question include the whole of the Pentateuch, three books which are plainly narrative, and one which is, in form, a story. Even a superficial examination reveals a rich variety of literary material. The Pentateuch is composed in part of matter which is narrative in form, in part of legal documents. The narrative portions from Genesis to First Samuel contain, here and there, poems of varying length. The legal material in the Book of Deuteronomy differs radically from that in the Books of Leviticus and Numbers. The narrative sections abound in puzzling

alterations of style and theme, as when one reads the fourth, then the fifth, and then again the sixth chapters of Genesis; and in duplicates, more or less close, of the narrative.

Such facts as these would have led naturally to the view that these books represent the results of a gradual growth of material into an impressive literary whole, substantially as modern reverent scholarship holds, were it not for the long-standing influence of the traditional view of the authorship and history of the books, which regards Moses as the author of the Pentateuch and is inclined to attribute to Joshua and Samuel the authorship of the others.

It is most unfortunate that the American Revision Committee in the Standard version of 1901 perpetuated the misleading titles to the first five of the Old Testament books, which seem to attribute them to Moses as their author. Probably few, if any, of the living scholars to whose self-sacrifice and erudition the Christian world owes this masterpiece of usefulness among the long line of noble versions of the English Bible, would seriously defend in any absolute sense the Mosaic authorship of the first five books. Many there are who regard the Pentateuch as containing much Mosaic material, who can no longer hold to the view that Moses was the one who gave to this material its present setting.

The original Hebrew Bible had nothing to say as regards authorship in the title of any of these books. The rabbinical scholars cared very little for distinguishing them as books. To them the Pentateuch was a section of the Sacred Scriptures which was to be read and studied as a whole. They called it the Thora or Law, for they were interested in it as law rather than as history. So far as the separate books were distinguished, they were given as titles simply the first distinctive phrase in each. Thus Genesis was called "In the beginning," Exodus was "Now these are the names," and so on. The names familiar to our ears were given to these books by the editors of the Septuagint, the great translation of the Old Testament into Greek, made not long before the Christian era. To these Greek scholars we owe not alone the excellent and appropriate names for the individual books of the Bible, but the habit of studying them as books, and their rearrangement and classification into substantially the order which all English Bibles use today.

Nor do the books themselves give any intimation regarding their authorship. There are passages in which Moses is declared to have written down certain details, but he is prevailingly referred to in the third person, and exactly like the other personalities mentioned.

The only foundation for the view that the Pentateuch was written down by Moses and transmitted intact to us lies in Jewish tradition. To many such a source would seem authoritative; and so it did seem to our fathers. The scholar of today has, however, a very limited respect for the judgments of the Jewish rabbis. They taught with all seriousness, in the very same connection in which we find their declaration that Moses wrote the Pentateuch and Job and that Joshua wrote the book called Joshua, and that Samuel wrote Judges, Ruth, and First Samuel,¹ the astonishing fact that Abraham co-operated with David in writing the eighty-ninth psalm.² No one who is really acquainted with the crudeness and childishness of their statements regarding the Bible is able to put confidence in them as serious authorities. In the fifteenth century, when there was a revival of Hebrew learning among the scholars of Europe, Jewish rabbis were the only available teachers, and their views regarding the Old Testament made a lasting impression upon the biblical students and teachers of England and Germany, who assumed that an unbroken tradition, two thousand years or so in age, was indisputable.

The historical study of the Bible is not absolutely modern, yet the thoroughgoing application of the historical method is comparatively recent. The essence of the method is in searching a writing for its own evidence regarding its character, origin, and history. Just as soon as the student begins to read the Bible carefully with these ends in view, he is compelled to depart from traditional views, but finds himself exchanging them for others which are far preferable.

The one who studies the first nine books of the Old Testament notices readily that the first five or six books belong together. The Book of Deuteronomy concludes the story of the life of Moses, but

¹ The tract *Bâba bâthra*, 14 b.

² See Driver's keen note, *Introduction*, p. vii.

does not bring to an equally satisfactory close the series of events with which the great lawgiver had to do. The land of Canaan had been promised to the fathers. The story of the Book of Joshua is necessary to complete the account of its conquest and settlement by the Hebrews. This argument from contents for placing the first six books in one group is supported by an argument from style. The literary peculiarities of the first five books are also found in Joshua. Hence scholars are accustomed to speak of the Hexateuch rather than of the Pentateuch.

The unity of these six books is very plain, but it is not the sort of unity produced by a single author, but rather the unity produced by an editor. It is, as McFadyen says, a unity of idea, not of execution. It illustrates the general progress of a great divine plan, but utilizes very varied material, sometimes of the most opposite character. The narrative is not always self-consistent. In Ex. 33:7-11 the sacred tabernacle is described as a tent, pitched outside of the camp, guarded by Joshua (33:11); in the Book of Numbers it is in the very center of the encampment, strictly guarded by Levites. In Ex. 6:3 it declares solemnly that God was not known to Abraham by his name Jehovah, and yet in Gen. 15:7 we read that Jehovah appeared to Abraham and said, "I am Jehovah that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees." Again, one finds the narrative curiously repeating itself, as when the origin of the name "Beersheba" is twice explained; once (Gen. 21:31) when Abimelech and Abraham made a treaty; again (26:33) in connection with an exactly similar treaty between Isaac and Abimelech. In Ex. 3:13 Moses does not know the name of the God of his fathers and is given the name, Jehovah, anew; in Ex. 6:3 the same facts are related again.

These and many other facts, which are given in detail by Driver or Kent, make it clear that the Hexateuch at least is literature with a history of growth behind it, not a mere record of events, made as they occur. This conclusion seems all the more reasonable when one recalls the great stretch of time which the six books purport to cover, and when one realizes the character of the history. It is a survey of generations, not a set of annals. It gathers up and exhibits the progress of centuries. It gives the reader the impression of the judgment of a historian, rather than of the report of a chronicler.

It is the deliberate conclusion of the sober and reverent scholarship of today that the Hexateuch was the outgrowth of four or five hundred years of active literary history, in addition to the centuries preceding the beginnings of literary composition—the centuries when the deeds were being enacted and the words said or sung which find a place. As it is read by us today, it represents the final combination of four distinguishable groups of narratives, each existing previously in an independent form.

The story of the gradual discovery of these four great sources of the hexateuchal narrative is fascinating. It covers the history of more than a century and a half. As early as 1753 A. D., on the basis of the fact that certain sections of the Book of Genesis use the Hebrew word "Elohim" for God, while certain other sections use the word "Jehovah," each being maintained consistently, the hypothesis was reached that two source-documents were discernible, differing in their use of the divine name. It was gradually noted that the passages set into contrast by this difference were characterized also by differences of style. In Genesis, for instance, the first and fifth chapters, which use the name "God," stand in marked contrast with those intervening, which use the name "Jehovah." They are formal, precise, almost legal in their repetition of regular phrases; while the latter is picturesque, vivid, with a narrative style which possesses great variety. So marked are these differences that other passages can be readily picked out by means of them, such as Gen. 7:6-12 or 9:1-7, which clearly belong to the same strand of narrative as the first chapter. Again, it was discovered that the passages thus differentiated by the use of varying terms for the Divine Being, and by differences of phraseology and style, were further distinguishable by their religious ideas. The precise and formal passages convey an idea of God that is majestic and transcendent. The picturesque, poetic passages often describe the Divine Being in terms which are almost human, as when Jehovah is spoken of as walking in a garden, or partaking of hospitality, or holding a discussion with a man. Finally, it was found that when the passages thus discriminated were arranged by themselves, a curious parallelism and completeness of each became apparent.

Thus arose the hypothesis that the first few chapters of Genesis

at least were compiled from two earlier documents of marked individuality. Originally these documents were distinguished, in accordance with the name for God which each seemed to prefer, as the Jehovistic and the Elohist. As the study of the subject proceeded, certain puzzling variations from these criteria appeared. Genesis, chap. 20, for instance, answers to all the characteristics of the Jehovistic narratives, except that it uses the word "Elohim," or "God," for the divine name; and not infrequently thereafter parallel cases are found involving the same fact. This revealed a third type of narrative, like the Jehovistic, but having an individuality of its own.

These three types of narrative—one precise, repetitious, formal, dignified, institutional, first known as the Elohist narrative, but later as the Priestly narrative, because it was seen to harmonize with the priestly legislation and with the priestly history in Chronicles; another free, flowing, lifelike, anthropomorphic, first known as the Jehovistic narrative, but now more generally called the Judean prophetic narrative, as indicating the prevailing interests of the authors and their standing, while avoiding the confusions of the earlier name; the third a similarly vivid, yet reverent, informal narrative, known as the Ephraimite prophetic narrative, because of its marked interest in details which belong to the northern kingdom—represent, according to the belief of scholars today, three great sources from which the first four and, in large part, the sixth books of the Old Testament were compiled. The fifth book, Deuteronomy, stands by itself, being independent in origin. Since it was incorporated into the Hexateuch, we must recognize four important sources for the completed work.

Its history may be simply described. The Hexateuch, as already stated, is a literary unity, but one which grew by a process of accretion. It contains material of many ages. As McFadyen remarks in his fascinatingly worded *Introduction*, "centuries of religious thought must lie between the God who partakes of the hospitality of Abraham under a tree (Gen., chap. 18) and the majestic, transcendent, invisible Being at whose word the worlds are born (Gen. chap. 1)." It is, as a whole, literature of noble type and undoubted power.

Now, if a student of Hebrew history ask himself at what period such literature could have been produced, he cannot find a date earlier than the days of David and Solomon. Before then literature of the true sort had no opportunity. The Hebrew people were struggling for very existence, or feeling their way to nationality. It was David who really gave his people a sense of strength and superiority, who gave them an outlook and a future, and hence an impulse to survey their origins. It was in his day that the prophetic order assumed importance and dignity, developing ultimately a class of trained men with leisure for literary pursuits.

For these prophetic narratives, burning with a desire to kindle a flame of religious patriotism in the hearts of their countrymen by setting before them the inspiring history of their past as God had developed it, there was at hand an abundance of material in the songs and traditions and records of the past. Some of these traditions were inherited from the Semitic past; others were the reflection or record of historical facts in the experience of the Hebrew people. Some explained historical movements; others, existing customs; still others, proper names of persons or places. Some were associated with great and well-known leaders; others, with shrines, or landmarks. Connected with these prose traditions were collections of songs and ballads, such as the Book of Jashar (Josh. 10: 12-14; II Sam. 1: 17-27) or the Book of the Wars of Jehovah (Num. 21: 14). These collections must represent many others, for the frequency with which a poetical structure appears in the narrative portions of the Old Testament indicates the variety, richness, and frequency of early Hebrew poetic compositions. It is not in the least unlikely that written records of varying fulness were available, but their existence is purely conjectural.

Not far from the middle of the ninth century B. C. a prophet or group of prophets in Judah first attempted a history of the Hebrew people from the very beginning of human history. It was essentially a history of the divine dealings with the nation and a presentation of each important event of that history in its orderly development. This Judean prophetic narrative, commonly referred to as *J*, was full of the thought of God, as a living, loving personality to be loved and obeyed by the individual as well as by the covenant nation. To

inculcate loyalty to him, the faithful One, was its dominant purpose. Its patriotism is hardly less apparent. The writer or writers were lovers of their country and their people, and purposed chiefly to stir the souls of their fellow-men to greater fidelity to God and the kingdom.

It is hardly correct to speak of one author. There was rather a group of them, or more exactly a school. The Judean prophetic narrative is not strictly homogeneous, and undoubtedly received additions of one sort and another during a long period of time. Yet for all practical purposes it may be distinguished as one great source of the Hexateuch, furnishing more than one-third of its contents and the bulk of the prophetic portion of the earlier sections.

A century later is the usually accepted date for the production of the second great prophetic narrative of Israel's history, usually referred to as E, traces of which come to view with the fifteenth chapter of Genesis. This was prepared by a group of prophets of the northern kingdom. The Judean prophecy narrative began with the creation of mankind (Gen., chap. 2) and included the earliest traditions of civilization. The northern or Ephraimite narrative probably began with the story of the call of Abraham and God's covenant with him, possibly with an account of his ancestry; but there is no evidence that it went back of that. The Ephraimite narrative was more definitely personal and religious than the Judean, and thus in a way justified itself. It is the source of many of the notable character-sketches of the Hexateuch. It laid great stress upon God's interpositions on behalf of his people, and his guidance of them. We may imagine that its writers felt that full justice had not been done in the earlier narrative to the divine factor in the nation's history. They showed that God wrought out his splendid purpose through the great leaders and fathers of Israel, and that from time to time he gave them encouragement and instruction by dreams or angelic messengers, or through his prophetic spokesmen. Their conceptions of God were more advanced, more spiritual than those of the earlier Judean writers. They would hardly have dared to speak of God as "walking in the garden in the cool of the day," or as taking food under the tree in front of Abraham's tent. The century intervening between the preparation of the document J and

the production of the earliest form of the document E must have been years of progressive religious thinking.

For some time these two great prophetic versions were current, side by side. Within a few decades of the supposed date of the preparation of E the northern kingdom fell, in 722 B. C. There is evidence that slight additions were made to this narrative, while it was still extant independently; but these additions may well have been made, as we would naturally expect that they would be, by Judean scholars. However that may be, it is true that the Judean prophetic circle, in the days of Hezekiah, or more probably in the days of Josiah, combined the two prophetic narratives into one, which is commonly referred to as JE. The marked individuality of each made this possible without undue repetition or too costly reconstruction. The Judean prophets seem to have given J the preference, but not where E was of more value. The relative completeness of each narrative when segregated shows the care that was taken to preserve everything of distinctive value. The resulting history of the Hebrew people was better balanced and more comprehensive than either, while it retained all of the characteristics which had given them value.

Thus two centuries of prophetic activity had resulted in a powerful narrative of God's relationship to Israel's growth, a narrative sermon which made for reverence and loyalty and obedience, and was intended to produce just such results.

In the days of Josiah we know that a lawbook came to light which produced a wonderful effect upon both king and people, leading to a far-reaching movement of reform. That code of law, with its narrative setting, forms one of the most remarkable books of the Hexateuch or of the Old Testament. Its narrative setting and the combination of it with JE appear to have been the work of the prophets of the exile.

But the combined work JED was still distinctively prophetic. Apparently this led, in connection with the collection and edition of the laws of the nation which resulted in Ezra's book of the law, to the writing, or at least to the sketching, of a third history of Israel, this time by priestly writers, who felt that justice had not been done to the institutional history of the nation. This document, known

commonly as P, aimed to indicate the origin and development of Israel's institutions and the historical origin of the law. So different was it from the prophetic JED that a third combination was readily made in course of time which resulted in the Hexateuch, substantially as we read it today.

The Hexateuch is thus a literature in itself, a splendid monument of religious zeal and insight; a contribution, not of one mind or even of one group of godly men, but of a long series of attempts, generation after generation, to interpret God's dealings with his people and to emphasize his love and goodness, his power and faithfulness. However impressive as a literary achievement, it is of far greater significance as a record of the advancing spiritual life of a people with true religious genius.

Considering each book of the Hexateuch by itself from the standpoint of its sources, we may note that Genesis exhibits the three sources J, E, and P more clearly than any other book, because E and P assume in Ex., chaps. 3 and 6, that God was first revealed as Jehovah to Moses, and therefore refrain in Genesis from its use, thus giving a clear mark of identification. E is rather fragmentary and supplemental, although important. The fourteenth chapter of Genesis cannot be identified with either of these three narratives; it seems to be a special source. The splendid poem in Gen., chap. 49, may have been preserved in a poetic collection.

Exodus exhibits solid sections of the P document in chaps. 25-31 or 35-40. The two prophetic narratives are readily observable, yet they are so blended that the separation is very difficult and often quite uncertain. In this book also we find a poem (chap. 15) taken doubtless from the poetic collections of the Hebrews.

Leviticus contains no JE material, but is wholly from P. It is not strictly homogeneous. Even a careless reader can see that chaps. 17-26 differ markedly from other portions of the book.

Numbers is mainly from P. In the narrative portions we find JE very closely blended. There are quotations from a book, "the Book of the Wars of Jehovah," and from other poetical sources.

Deuteronomy introduces a new document, D, peculiar to itself, and includes little, if any, of the others.

Joshua draws its concrete and valuable historical data in the

first twelve chapters from JE which is so blended as to make a certain separation difficult. The isolated notes of the struggle with the Canaanites found here and there throughout chaps. 13-22, and repeated in Judg., chap. 1, are probably from J, but the fine review in chap. 24 is from E. Fully half of the book comes from P, and represents that document more fairly than any other portion of the Hexateuch, exhibiting its narrative no less than its legal value.

In the Book of Joshua appears a new literary factor, due to a general re-editing of the historical books, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, during the exile by the group of prophetic scholars who produced Deuteronomy. Chapter 1; 5:4, 6-8; 9:1, 2, 28-43; chap. 23, belong to this source, called often deuteronomic, since the characteristic phraseology of Deuteronomy appears.

These deuteronomic editors arranged the histories in their present order, and furnished the introduction and the explanatory passages referred to above in Joshua, which they separated from the Hexateuch and made the first of the series of historical books.

The Book of Judges furnishes an interesting and valuable illustration of the literary growth of a biblical book. A line can be easily and sharply drawn between early material, its first embodiment in literary form, and the later editorial shaping of the whole. The stories about the judges, with their naïve and warlike atmosphere, are clearly popular tales resting on actual facts. But these stories are set into an interpretative framework easily recognizable as deuteronomic. It sets forth a sort of philosophy of the history, calling attention to the fact that unfaithfulness to Jehovah was followed regularly by punishment, that by penitence, and then forgiveness. Six stories are told in illustration. The story of Abimelech, and the notices of Shamgar and the minor judges have no framework, which suggests that they were added at the time that 1:1 to 2:5 were prefixed and chaps. 17 to 21 appended to the book.

The Book of Ruth is a beautiful idyl, a sweet and touching story which speaks for itself.

The Book of First Samuel is a splendid specimen of Hebrew historical writing at its best. Like its immediate predecessors, it was clearly of prophetic origin. It apparently deals with the happen-

ings of upward of a century, really accounting for the progress of that century through its personalities. The first twelve chapters, which include the selections of the International lessons for 1907, are to be rated with the central portion of the Book of Judges. Eli and Samuel are virtually to be classed with the judges. The deuteronomic editorial element is apparent in chap. 12.

This sketch of the sources of these early books of the Old Testament reveals their character and their value. The books represent sifted material, which had already approved itself to the popular mind and heart before it was used in broader and finer ways by these prophetic and priestly men of God. It pleased God to reveal himself through generations and groups of reverently minded men, rather than through a selected personality here and there. The Old Testament was not in any sense due to accident, or to mere historical or even to religious research. The motives that gave it gradual form were those which have inspired great and glorious achievements in every age, for which men have yielded their lives and spent their energies. They were the compelling power of a great and growing ideal of God and man, which led these earnest men to deem it their high and holy duty to pass on to the men and women of their generation and of the future what had spoken to their heart. Perhaps none of them even faintly dreamed of the way in which God would crown their work.

The Old Testament grew as the people of Israel became spiritually wise. Its message at every stage was a vital message regarding God in his relations with man; therefore it was eternal.